




**MOOD:** 😞 exhausted

**MUSIC:** Martin Carthy & The UK Group - The Mermaid



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Well, it's all over now but the shouting.

And shouting we are going to have a lot of. A whole hell of a lot.

Naomi's on night shift this week--she and Ronnie trade off, because they still tell stories in Camber about Deputy Vincent Hollingsworth, back in the sixties, who was stuck on the night shift for six straight months and went completely batshit crazy. Deputy Hollingsworth came within about six inches of committing the only successful assassination of a public official in Clayton County history, and the first thing Naomi did, as soon as I was officially "Sheriff Villette," was move the filing cabinet so I could see the bullet holes.

"But the thing is," she said, and I've heard it other places, too, "he didn't try to shoot Sheriff Watson for being a sadistic son of a bitch, which he was. He tried to shoot him for being a hole in the world."

"A which in the what?" I said.

She gave me a helpless kind of shrug. "He was shouting it all over the place when they arrested him, and then at the trial, and then out at Mattichitaw until he died in '85." Naomi's Aunt Loula is still a nurse out at Mattichitaw Mental Hospital, so I figured I knew what her sources were. "A hole in the world. Completely crazy." And she shoved the filing cabinet back into place.

So nobody in the Clayton County Sheriff's Department ever works nights for more than a month at a stretch. But sometimes I kind of wonder if Deputy Hollingsworth felt about Sheriff Watson the way I feel about the Sutter place. I've never met a person who made me feel that way, but that doesn't mean such a person couldn't exist. And I've heard other stories about Sheriff Watson--about whom the *nicest* thing anyone has ever said was that he was a member in good standing of the KKK--and he sure sounds like a walking talking version of the Sutter place, like nothing good could ever survive near him.

Don't mind me. I get a little crazy myself sometimes.

I waited until Naomi came on duty--did paperwork and all the other ordinary shit that piles up while you aren't watching--and then gave her the rundown of what I'd learned.

"You think it's the Finnister girl," she said.

"Yeah. She's the only one I know for a fact was lying. And she was the only one who was scared."

"Oh she was not."

"Okay, okay. But she was the only one who was *that* scared."

Naomi nodded reluctantly. "So what do you want to do?"

"Well, Ronnie didn't find the Camaro anywhere, and Ronnie's thorough."

"Is that what we're calling it today?" Naomi muttered, but she flapped a hand at me, about half apologetically, to go on.

"So we know it's nowhere near the Sutter place, and we know it's not anywhere obvious. Because face it, a bright red 2002 Camaro is going to be hard to miss in Camber."

"Okay," said Naomi. "I'm with you that far."

"So somebody hid it. Either Vernon or our footprint girl, and I'm thinking it wasn't Vernon or we'd've found it in the Sutters' driveway. So I want to cruise by Alma Finnister's house and take a look."

"Is this the we-need-a-warrant kind of look, sheriff?"

"Well, that's why you're coming with me, Naomi," I said. "So you can testify it isn't."

"And if you don't spot the Camaro?"

"Then we think of some damn thing else," I said. "Come on."

The Finnisters lived across town from the Sutter place, meaning about a five minute drive. Aside from the home schooling thing--which most people took as an insult to the Clayton County Schools--there was nothing particularly crazy about Gordon and

Dolores Finnister. They were devout Christians of a somewhat fundamentalist stripe, and the worst you had to worry about from them was getting pinned down and harangued about "Christian education." I was pretty sure that neither of them had grown up in the kind of restricted environment they were inflicting on their daughters--Alma had two younger sisters, Lois and Carol--but that's not legally child abuse, no matter what I think about it.

I turned left on Bucknell, and Naomi shot me a look. "Finnisters live on Bolt."

"And their house backs on Chester. Along the ravine."

"Oh," said Naomi. There's a good stretch of Chester Road with no houses--ravine on one side and the ugly ass-end of the industrial park on the other. In the summers, kids go there to make out and smoke pot, but in January, it's not someplace anybody wants to be. It's where I'd hide a car if I had to, and for Alma Finnister, it had the advantage that she could walk home with nobody the wiser.

We were about two lots down from the Finnisters' backyard when Naomi said, "Holy shit."

I braked and pulled over. Another second and I saw what she'd seen--a glint of red down among the scrub trees. We got out and went to the head of the slope.

Bright red 2002 Camaro. Vernon Weatherbee's license plate and a bumper sticker that said GO CLAYTON COUGARS!

I looked at Naomi. Naomi looked at me. We started down.

There was blood on the steering wheel, blood on the gearshift, blood on the driver's door, bloody smudges of fingerprints on the rearview mirror. And a stupid bobble-headed football player on the dashboard with Vernon Weatherbee's number painted on it in what looked like nail-polish.

"Jesus," Naomi said under her breath. "Jesus."

There wasn't much else to say. We hiked back to the car, took Chester to Ford, Ford to Bolt. Parked in front of the Finnisters' house. Nice enough house, no uglier than three-quarters of the houses in town. And the yard was immaculate. No children's toys, certainly no swing-set. Just winter-yellow grass and bushes waiting for spring, and a stupid concrete cherub in the flower bed

by the door.

I rang the bell. Naomi stood back a little. Moral support and also just in case anybody did anything dumb.

Dolores Finnister opened the door.

"Mrs. Finnister," I said, hating every word. "I need to speak to Alma, please." And seeing Alma coming into the hall behind her mother, I added, "It's about a Camaro."

Alma Finnister went a horrible color, and her hands came up to her face. "I kept hoping it was a dream," she said, barely loud enough that any of us could hear her, and then she started to cry.

That was when the shouting started, and it's not done yet. I had to tell the Finnisters which lawyer to call--there's more than one that does criminal work in Clayton County, and more than one that does juvenile, but the only one I'd trust to hold a baby is Eli Chilcoate, and he has to drive in from Sparta. I just saw his car pull up, and in a minute, we'll go back to our so-called "conference room," and see if Alma Finnister can tell us what happened to Vernon Weatherbee last night.

TAGS: [down the rabbit hole](#)



This looks like a good idea.  
...

This.  
...

Little guy's not bad.  
Gotta teach RHex to smear.

6 comments



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You, too?


Or, as I commented to one of the previous posts: "more, please?"

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Seriously just did that.




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Good timing, too.




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Well, darn.

I wanna know what comes next, too.

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Don't leave us hanging!